MMR_0012 Dr. Edward A. Heffner

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"WHY SHOULD I APPLY?"

The Achievement Award program has generated a good deal of heat in the short while that it has been in operation—sometimes I think that there has been more heat than light. But just about the time I begin to get discouraged at the criticism and such epithets as "green stamp region" and "those egotists who apply for honors", and the like, along comes a ray of sunshine. For example, a couple of old timers like Bill Walthers and Ed Ravencroft set to work and do the necessary application forms and attach reams of documentation and qualify themselves for sufficient awards to be given the granddaddy of them all: Master Model Railroader. Or some comparative newcomer to the ranks of model railroading (I won't name any, but there have been quite a few) qualifies himself for an award and applies for it and sometimes, adds a couple of words of appreciation for the program. One of the biggest and most rewarding results of the program is the marked improvement in the number and quality of entries at the model contests, both regional and national. I've been looking at, judging, and entering model contests for a long while, but I have never seen such a collection of superb models as the one on display at the 1963 national convention in Indianapolis. There were models there that didn't even place that would have been first place winners at contests in years past. Of course, I know that the AA program is not the only reason for this, but I'm convinced that it is a major reason.

Out of conversations and correspondence with the national Achievement Awards chairman and several other officers, I've come up with several impressions and a few convictions. For one thing, I believe that there exists a vast misunderstanding about the nature of the Achievement Awards in the first place. Good men are criticizing the program adversely, and I know some of them. They're nice guys, and I feel sure that they are sincere. But I think they're just sincerely wrong. In sort, I suspect that they are talking before they read about the reasoning behind the program or listen to a rational explanation of it.

Take this matter of "asking for honors" for example. None of us (I hope) is going to brazenly request that an honor be conferred upon him. I wouldn't, and I know no other modeller who would, believe me. But—and that's a great big "BUT"—an Achievement Award is not an "honor". Read on, and I think I can show you what I mean. In the second place, the program is quite clear on the manner of obtaining the various awards and a little thought will bring the matter clearly into focus. One *must* apply for most of the awards, because he and he alone knows whether he is qualified for one. Some of them, to be sure, such as Association Volunteer, are on the record—I pointed out to a member of the Region not long ago that he was quali-

fied for that Award because he had earned (EARNED, mind you) the required number of points as a committee chairman. And he worked while he was chairman of that committee, believe me. He applied for it, and now has it hanging on his wall. And he is glad that he did—he said so. However, none can reasonably know whether *you* are qualified for Model Railroad Engineer, Electrical, for example, unless he has watched you wire your railroad and invent your circuitry, etc. You have to set it forth so that the appropriate official can see whether you really qualify or not. No one can do this for you. And so it just won't do for you to sit around and wait for someone to come along and present you with that Award. It won't happen, that's why.

There's another little phrase that makes it necessary for one to make application for most of the Awards, especially the ones concerning craftmanship. It does not look very impressive at first reading, but it is important, and it is—I think—one of the key aspects of the whole program. It is to the effect that the applicant for any award goes on record, in writing, that he is willing to asist any other modeller working in that area of model railroading. Only you can volunteer yourself as a consultant—no one can do it for you. And don't tell me that you're too modest to do this. Which one of us is not tickled silly to have another modeller come up and say that he is looking for some pointers or advice on building some item or other and can you give me some help, friend? It's part of the fun—and sharing a skill or talent is being a real neighbor.

Now let's get back to this "egotist asking for honors" business. You know that honorary life memberships in NMRA are from time to time conferred upon individuals who have performed outstanding service to the hobby as a whole, and that in recent years several Presidents' Awards have been given—again to people who have done something unusual (generally a lot of very hard work) for the benefit of all of us. These are honors—and, rightly enough, there aren't many of them handed out. They wouldn't be honors if they were dealt out like green stamps, say. Would you ask for one of these honors? Would I? Would any decent model railroader? Of course not! But an Achievement Award is not a honor. Repeat NOT.

Let's draw a parallel—colleges and universities from time to time confer honorary degrees upon distinguished alumni (or alumnae) or upon outstanding public figures. This is done as a recognition for public service in most instances. An ex-President of the United States, for example, has had—I am told—over fifty honorary degrees given him. And he didn't ask for any of them. The point is—honorary degrees are conferred—not asked for.

Those same colleges and universities that confer two or three, or a half-dozen honorary degrees each June, at the same time (most of them) present several dozen, or hundreds of post-graduate degrees: Master's earned Doctorates, and the like. Now,

how do these receivers of post-graduate degrees get them- Why, they *apply* for them. To get a master's degree in education, for example, one takes 1½ to 3 years of post-graduate study, writes a thesis, and applies for admission to the degree. In writing. Then, in due course, if all of his qualifications are in order—and he has to present and prove his qualifications—he gets his degree.

The parallel is this, briefly, An earnest, hard-working model railroaders spends a great deal of time and effort and accomplishes a great deal of good for the hobby as a whole. He does this for the sheer love of throwing himself into his avocation and with the most unselfish of motives. Along comes the board of trustees and gives him an honorary life membership in NMRA, or the current president presents him with a President's Award in recognition of his selfless devotion to the welfare of the whole body of model railroaders. This is a good deal like Harvard University conferring an honorary LL.D. on Herbert Hoover for his yeoman service in relieving suffering in the days of World War I.

And at that same graduation ceremony that same University bestowed a large number of master's degrees and earned doctorates of one kind or another. The recipients of those degrees were rather like the P.O.M. who buckles down and makes himself an expert at creating scenery, or building boxcars, or setting up the electrical circuitry for his own or someone else's model railroad. He, like they, laid his groundwork: study, experimentation, and just plain sweat and hard work. He, like they, can then write up his qualifications (he calls it an AA application—they call it an examination). He, like they, can present his thesis, only in his case it is documentation of his achievement and evidence that he has produced good enough results that he can win in competition with his peers or convince impartial judges that his work warrants a merit award, outside of competition.

See what I mean? No one is going to force you to apply for a post-graduate degree, and no one can do it for you. You've got to do the work and then prove it. And it is no more egotistical to apply for an Achievement Award than it is to apply to your college for an M.A. It would be egotistical, I suppose, to harbour the attitude, "Well they (whomever *they* are) know I'm a master car builder—why don't they look me up and present me with a certificate." But I don't think any of the model railroaders I know are that conceited.

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